Crops

An abundance of spring precipitation, accompanied by cooler than normal summer temperatures, brought about a difficult growing season in 2004. Saturated fields in May and June caused delays in planting of corn and soybeans, and cool temperatures slowed growth through August. Warmer temperatures in September and October helped crops catch up, but it was too late for some fields. Although the rains hurt the first crop of hay, successive crops did very well.

Precipitation was well above normal in May and June, especially for the southern part of the state, where some districts had rainfall more than 8 inches above normal. The months of July through September brought a total of 3-4 inches less than normal precipitation to the state. In September, much of the southern half of the state had less than 1 inch of rain for the entire month.

Temperatures remained below average across the state until September, when farmers were thankful for a significant warm-up. This allowed corn and soybeans to mature at a faster pace, making up for some of the growth hindered by the cooler temperatures. Growing degree days finished above normal for most areas of the state, thanks to the warmer temperatures at the end of the growing season.

Corn planted for all purposes totaled 3.60 million acres in 2004. Acres harvested for grain declined for the second straight year to 2.60 million acres; while acres harvested for silage increased to 950,000, the highest since 1993. Although silage production decreased to 13.3 million tons, Wisconsin maintained the ranking as the top-producing state for corn silage with 12 percent of the national total. Grain yield increased from 129 bushels per acre in 2003 to 136 bushels per acre in 2004.

Soybean acreage planted and harvested decreased from the record levels of 2003, but yields increased from a 15-year low of 28 bushels to 35 bushels per acre. High amounts of precipitation in the early months of the growing season contributed greatly to the smaller amount of acreage planted and harvested, while more rain toward the end of the season helped increase yields.

Winter wheat and alfalfa suffered little winterkill damage, but wheat scab became a problem due to the wet spring and cooler than average summer.

Winter wheat yields dropped significantly to 56 bushels per acre, but production increased due to a jump in the amount of acres planted and harvested. This resulted in a record 12.6 million bushels produced. The early wet weather brought an increase in the quantity of first crop alfalfa, but the precipitation did not let up, resulting in only fair to good quality. Second, third, and fourth crop hay fared better in quality. Overall, hay yields and production were better than 2003, but lower than average.

Looking at the leading processing vegetable states in 2004, Wisconsin ranked third in harvested area and production of the eight selected crops. In terms of total value of processed vegetables, Wisconsin jumped to second, trailing only California. Wisconsin still ranks first in production for processing snap beans with 39 percent of the national total. The Badger State ranks third in the production of processing sweet corn and peas, although yields for both crops decreased from 2003. The potato crop looked good all year, and produced record yields. However, total production decreased to 30.5 million hundred weight due to fewer acres planted and harvested.

Cranberry yield and production decreased from 2003's record levels, but cranberry acres harvested remained the same. Wisconsin retained its position as the top producing state with 53 percent of the national production. The apple and cherry crops also turned in reduced yields with no change in the acres harvested from 2003. The wet spring and cool summer hindered pollination, contributing to the smaller yields.